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## Shooting into Outer Space

### Reframing Modern Vision

IN WIM WENDERS'S DOCUMENTARY tribute to Ozu Yasujiro, *Tokyo-Ga* (1985), the filmmaker searches through modern Tokyo in an attempt to discover some remnant of the film world Ozu had created. At one point on the top of the Tokyo Tower (the world's tallest self-supporting steel tower at 333 meters, 13 meters taller than the Eiffel Tower) he encounters another German tourist filmmaker in search of fresh images, Werner Herzog. Wenders's film recurrently excoriates the modern world of debased images in contrast to the ordered images found in Ozu's films. Television especially, Wenders claims, has inundated the world with false images. High above Tokyo Herzog too mourns the loss of vital images. He is searching, he indicates, for "pure, clear, transparent images," which he feels have vanished from an overdeveloped earth (that crowded Tokyo down into which they peer). He claims he would consider any risk or effort to attain these images: climb huge mountains or travel into outer space on rockets to Mars or Saturn, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Skylab or the space shuttle. Wenders, however, indicates his own view that such images must be found on earth, there in the chaos of Tokyo.

This encounter between two Germans high above Tōkyō raises for me the issues that the conjunction of modernity, vision, cinema, and global (or indeed extraterrestrial) space bring to us. Lest anyone misunderstand, modern vision is mediated vision, not simply the biological inheritance of the human eye (as fascinating and complex as that may be), but vision that relates to a manmade environment, whether the urbanscape of Tōkyō or the vast expanses of the railway systems cutting across natural landscapes. Modern vision thus understood includes the devices that supplement eyesight with the technological effects of enlargement, penetration, or reproduction, from the telescope to the X-ray to the photograph and the cinema. Of course, mechanical devices cannot truly be said to “see,” and indeed the difference between these modes of mediated vision and human eyesight is part of what defines modern vision. We are film historians, and like filmmakers Wenders and Herzog, we are speaking about *images*, not simply vision as a biological phenomenon.

Dziga Vertov called his conception of modern vision the camera eye or Kino-Eye, the cinema eye. The camera eye, according to Vertov, constitutes a complex instrument, which included not only all the deviations from the “unarmed human eye” that technology made available, but also a radical rearrangement of space and time, a tool for understanding the modern world. To quote a well-known passage from his manifesto “Kinoks”: “Now and forever I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse, I plunge full speed into a crowd, I outstrip running soldiers, I fall on my back, I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies.”<sup>1</sup> Kino-Eye’s mastery of space not only included the camera’s ability to move, but also the ability of montage to coordinate diverse points upon the globe. As my doctoral student Doron Galili has demonstrated, Vertov believed that the ultimate attainment of this new level of modern vision might come not from film, but from television (which he termed “radio-eye”).<sup>2</sup> But does Vertov’s utopian conception of a modern mode of vision only lead to Wenders’s jeremiad in *Tōkyō-Ga* as he watches television in his Tōkyō hotel room: “every shitty television set, no matter where, is the center of the world. The Center has become a ludicrous idea, the world as well, the image of the world a ludicrous idea.”

Not the least of the complexity of the concept of modern vision lies in its essential ambivalence: its utopian and dystopian aspects; its role in extending the powers of sight into a visionary insight that stitches the globe together; or its role as what Heidegger called the “world picture” in which the world is reduced to an exchangeable and objectifying image,

expressive of man's dominance over nature and his fellow man.<sup>3</sup> Modern vision aspires to a victory over space, the technological "far sight" envisioned by both Kino-Eye and television. Herzog's invocation of the view from a rocket ship as both a mode of escape from the chaos of earth and the means of achieving a new sort of vision belongs to a tradition more than a century long. Attaining such vision through a perspective beyond the horizon of the earth appears in both actuality and in fiction and makes clear the way modernity constitutes a technological complex, an environment in which various technologies interact and transform. Paul Virilio in a rather fast and loose manner has shown how cinema grew within a technological environment of modern warfare, including the development of aerial bombardment and surveillance.<sup>4</sup> The use of images as a tool of warfare by other means, certainly forms a part of modern vision, and indeed may underlie Herzog's own aggressive desire to penetrate into dangerous environments such as war zones in search of his pure images. But the pursuit of images from aerial perspectives also derives from the new spaces the modern world makes available, from the sublime desire for mountain top perspectives of romanticism, to the witty illustrations of imaginary balloon voyages by Grandville,<sup>5</sup> to the documentary balloon views of Paris captured by pioneer photographer Nadar,<sup>6</sup> and the photographic panoramas of Eadweard Muybridge.<sup>7</sup> As in the view from the Tokyo Tower, photography and cinema search out an all-encompassing image of space, from Lumière's and Edison's films from the elevator ascending the Eiffel Tower during the 1900 Universal Exposition to the views from satellites presented in Imax.

The symbiosis between the airplane and the cinema forms a rich theme in modern vision, one that some decades ago Angela Dalle Vacche indicated should be explored with the same attention that had been given to the relation between cinema and the railway.<sup>8</sup> I will not undertake this broad and rich task here, but rather a closely related one, already introduced by Herzog on top of the Tokyo Tower: the pursuit of rocket vision. My tutor text is quite frankly a chestnut, probably the best-known early film, Georges Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* from 1902. As familiar as it is, closely examining this film not only allows us to establish the ambiguous spaces of early film, but also the way this complex and hybrid space found its perfect narrative in the exploration of a space beyond the earth. Through Méliès's film I explore the rocket not only as a mode of transport but also as a vehicle of sight.

*A Trip to the Moon* may not only be the best-known example of early cinema, but also the best-known silent film. Its widespread availability and rather short running time make it an obvious staple of both introduction to film and film history classes. But more important,

the film still provides the entertainment it promised more than a century ago. Its charm remains immediate, its humor and visual attractions still compelling.<sup>9</sup> Even if claiming the film as the first science-fiction film constitutes an anachronistic projection of a later genre, *A Trip to the Moon* does envision a future based on modern technology and forges a link (albeit tongue-in-cheek) with the literature of Verne and Wells. (I must specify that the moon voyage in Verne's novel *From the Earth to the Moon* and Méliès's film remains within the domain of artillery, as the name of the organization that undertakes it in the former, the Baltimore Gun Club, testifies: a shell launched from a giant gun, rather than a self-propelled rocket.) The sources for Méliès's film are diverse and cut across genres. But the lighthearted style of performance (although not entirely foreign to the semi-satirical caricature Verne draws of the rather eccentric Baltimore Gun Club) refers to the burlesque tradition of *féerique* pantomime that Méliès drew on, the magical playlets incorporating transformation and tricks that Méliès offered in his Théâtre Robert-Houdin, patterned on the models of British magical entrepreneur Maskelyne,<sup>10</sup> as well as the comical adaptation of voyages into space in the operetta *Le Voyage dans la lune*,<sup>11</sup> and even on the staging of a trip to the moon as an amusement park attraction in Fred Thompson's Luna Park in Coney Island.<sup>12</sup> *A Trip to the Moon* reflects the intermedial palimpsest that typified early cinema (and I would argue cinema for most of its history) and all these sources contributed to the film's use of space. One could claim that Méliès's film explores the new composite space of cinema as imaginatively as its astronomers did outer space.

The enduring historical significance—and popularity—of *A Trip to the Moon* is undoubtedly overdetermined. Its combination of cinematic tricks and attractions with a simple but very coherent story allows it not only to exemplify both early cinema's dominant as a cinema of attractions but also feed an emerging interest in story films.<sup>13</sup> Its subject matter, exploration of outer space, continued to fascinate audiences for the rest of the century (I remember as a child first seeing an abbreviated version of the film as part of a prologue to Mike Todd's 1956 Verne film adaptation *Around the World in Eighty Days* as an indication of Verne's power of prophecy in the era of the launching of the first satellites). But as with every enduring work of art, *A Trip to the Moon* has been able to be seen in a variety of ways, appear within numerous contexts, and illuminate different aspects of the cinema. In the canonical grand narrative of cinematic development, best formulated by Georges Sadoul and modified (but basically continued) by Jean Mitry, *A Trip to the Moon* represented a primitive step in the evolution of narrative cinema, one dominated by *theatricality*, an approach to cinematic space which maintained a framing

of the action within the broad view of the theatrical proscenium arch and simulated what Sadoul called the viewpoint of the "*monsieur de l'orchestre*," a wide unselective framing with action oriented frontally.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the emergence of a cinematic style that would break down this theatrical space into separate shots, *A Trip to the Moon* was characterized by a lack of editing, with cuts (or, in many prints of *A Trip to the Moon*, dissolves), which do not construct a dramatic space, but simply move us from location to location, from theatrical tableau to theatrical tableau. For Sadoul and Mitry, who saw the development of editing that would emerge with D. W. Griffith and others as the essential form of cinematic space, *A Trip to the Moon* remained at a primitive stage of this evolution.

This view was disputed by the post-Brighton generation of film historians who revised accounts of early cinema, primarily André Gaudreault, who in polemical exchanges with Mitry especially disputed this description of Méliès and *A Trip to the Moon*.<sup>15</sup> Gaudreault pointed out that in fact the editing in *A Trip to the Moon* is actually more fluid than the traditional description would indicate. Likewise several historians offered a more nuanced account of the theatrical heritage of early cinema (continuing the tradition of A. Nicholas Vardac who described certain forms of nineteenth-century theater as moving toward the more flexible space of cinema, rather than posing its absolute Other).<sup>16</sup> *A Trip to the Moon* derives largely from the spectacular theatrical tradition of the fairy pantomime in which a succession of scene changes provided a major visual attraction of the form. Thus the opening of the film follows the planning, construction, and launching of the moon projectile by moving from elaborate set to elaborate set, following the group of scientists/explorers. Once they land on the moon, we again follow the explorers through even more visually unique sets (the surface of the moon, the lunar caves, the palace of the moon king). Rather than a space constructed through dramatic action, this succession of spectacular displays of set design provides an almost kaleidoscopic series of views.

Gaudreault especially cites one sequence as contradicting the Sadoul/Mitry description of the film's theatricality. The return of the projectile from the moon to the earth moves rapidly through a series of shots, from the spaceship teetering on the edge of the moon, descending through space, penetrating the surface of the ocean, and then floating deep within the sea. As Gaudreault claimed, a sequence of four shots following a single action and lasting only, by his count, twenty seconds, certainly proposes an approach to space that cannot be simply equated with theatricality.<sup>17</sup> Since this revisionist history, a dichotomy between theatricality and cinematic approaches to space no longer holds as the dominant description of space in early cinema. Theater itself has been

approached in a more varied manner by historians ranging from David Mayer to Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, respecting the range of stage practices and genres.<sup>18</sup> The diverse sources for early cinema discovered in the work of John L. Fell, Charles Musser, Charlie Keil, Frank Kessler, Matthew Solomon, Gaudreault, and others—from comic strips, newspaper and journal illustrations, magic performances and illusions, or magic lantern shows—have complicated our sense of the visual heritage of early cinema.<sup>19</sup>

I want to examine the sequence of landing on the moon. Again a single trajectory of action unites several shots (three or five, depending on how you decide to define and count shots). The first shot shows the huge artillery gun used to launch the projectile toward the moon (in the background, the muzzle of the huge gun pointed toward the heavens and a minuscule distant moon visible through a gap in the clouds are shown in a theatrical flat, painted in exaggerated perspective). The following shot shows a theatrical backdrop of the sky, including an image of the moon that enlarges a bit, as if the camera were drawing closer. A dissolve transforms this painted image of the moon into a grimacing moon-face, a circular cratered form whose center includes a heavily madeup mobile human face—the traditional Man in the Moon. This moon-face enlarges even more, again giving the impression that either the moon or the camera is moving. As the moon-face looms larger, a substitution splice makes a projectile appear on it, as if it had collided with the moon's eye (the projectile appears suddenly, rather than entering the frame, and the moon continues to advance, the face reacting as if it had "something in its eye.")

The next shot shows a set of the lunar surface portrayed in the traditional theatrical recessive flats set in grooves at different depths to portray a deep lunar landscape, marked by craters and stalagmite-like rock formations. The projectile enters from the left, landing on the surface, and the explorers emerge from it, gesticulating broadly their wonder at the scene. The spaceship disappears from view suddenly (whether by a substitution splice or by sinking beneath the stage is a bit unclear). The explorers regroup, as the most distant flat of the lunar landscape sinks slowly out of sight (lowered below the stage surface). Another flat flies into view vertically even further back, showing the "full earth" rising into the sky, and continuing past the top of the frame: a spectacular sight the space travelers fully appreciate. This is followed by a pyrotechnic effect of smoke and flame erupting from one of the craters.

For the remainder of the shot, the black background in the depth of the shot serves as a dark reserve against which a series of spectacular superimpositions appear; the filmic technique of double exposure takes

over from stage machinery. First, a comet travels laterally to the left; then the stars forming the Big Dipper appear, from which women's faces emerge, glowering at the explorers who have stretched out to sleep on the surface below them. Finally three emblematic figures of celestial entities: Phoebe, the crescent moon; Saturn, both God and Planet; and two women holding a star, Gemini. The celestial figures cause a snowfall that awakes the sleeping group, who, shivering, set off in search of shelter in the crater.

This brief sequence shows how complex and multiple the space of early cinema can be and demonstrates again that a simple dichotomy between the theatrical and the cinematic cannot express the dynamic and varied approaches to space a film like *A Trip to the Moon* offers. This is a hybrid space, an assemblage of intersecting, and even competing, spatial practices, reflecting the way early cinema is not only intermedial, as Gaudreault and others have emphasized, but also multidimensional. On the one hand, the sequence includes the hallmarks of what would develop into a cinematic approach, subordinating space to the flow of action: the shell shooting into space and landing on the moon. Individual shots merge into a continuous sequence by following the course of this action.<sup>20</sup> However, the shot of the lunar surface also shows a deliberate—and delightful—use of the theatrical construction of space through mobile flats and grooves, flies and traps. More than a century later, this moonscape set retains its visual power creating an intricately designed environment, anticipating the surrealist cosmic space of Yves Tanguy, as well as Mario Bava's marvelous sets for *Planet of the Vampires* (1965). But Méliès's masterful deployment of theatrical flats frames his use of filmic superimpositions. The women's heads popping from the stars employ stage machinery within a filmic technique. Méliès freely (and effectively) combines filmic techniques as the equivalent of the theatrical practice of the *vision scene*, using the far background of the stage as an area in which scenes from radically different or distant spaces could be revealed (dreams, visions, or as in the versions of *Enoch Arden* or *The Corsican Brothers*, simultaneous but distant actions).<sup>21</sup> As opposed to the naturalistic sets and practices that were taking over serious drama around this time, Méliès remained faithful to the frankly artificial devices of popular spectacle. He could also insert cinema into them (as in his production of films to be projected during *féeries* staged at the Théâtre du Châtelet).<sup>22</sup> Or he could insert theatrical machines into his films. Which was host and which was parasite? It is the juxtaposition of these diverse visual effects that makes the sequences so effective.

Whether or not the collagelike space of such a sequence can be claimed as an influence on the transformation in space that occurred



in modernist painting in the years that follow (and I think a good case can be made for this influence), Méliès's cinema pushed the visual devices of the nineteenth-century spectacular theater (the operetta, the pantomime, and the magical playlet) into a representation that no longer corresponded simply to the inert space of theatricality or the continuous space composed of different orientations that later cinema achieved through editing. Instead he creates a palimpsest, a playful space of display, with differing modes of representation and even different spatial scales juxtaposed within a single image. The Sadoul/Mitry tradition that casts film history into a linear evolution toward a uniquely cinematic style can only experience this visually impressive display of stage machinery as a residual, outmoded practice. To a nonteleological eye, this sequence reveals the joys of what Bazin called "mixed cinema,"<sup>23</sup> creating a hybrid space whose jagged fit between several modes expresses Méliès's modern pragmatism: a filmmaker in pursuit of visual effects rather than stylistic coherence. In this moon landing Méliès juxtaposes different approaches to space into a sort of collage based in visual display, as different flats move in and out of the frame (laterally left to right, horizontally above and below) and give way to and interact with filmic superimposition.

My work on early cinema refused to characterize the elements of discontinuity in cinematic practice as a primitive awkwardness to be smoothed out as cinema gained greater mastery over its techniques, but instead saw this seeming incoherence as a different mode of address. This can be seen in this film's approach to editing as well, as previous historians have pointed out. Let us return to the cuts that precede the landing. The cut that moves us from the moon-face blinking at the projectile stuck in its eye to the landing on the surface has been analyzed by Gaudreault and Musser as a repeated action edit, or temporal overlap.<sup>24</sup> Such cutting, especially in Edwin S. Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* (1903), became an emblem of the unique editing of early cinema in contrast to the smooth cutting on action that marked classical editing. When an action moves across two locations or orientations (especially moving from interiors to exteriors), early filmmakers frequently stuttered the action, showing its complete trajectory from both orientations, thus causing it to repeat. To put it simply, Méliès shows the spaceship land twice, once in the "long shot" of the moon face and once as the stage machine of the projectile lands on the set of the lunar surface. As some commentators have claimed, a simple snip of the scissor could eliminate such a repetition. Undoubtedly. But *A Trip to the Moon* makes especially clear what else it would eliminate: the spectacular display of two views of the moon landing, not only from different positions, but also in different modes (the comic caricature-like moon-face and the theatrical sensation



scene). In Méliès's style spectacle trumps continuity of action, and visual variety triumphs over the diegetic verisimilitude valued by later cinema.

But after revisiting this *locus classicus* of early discontinuity (or nonlinear continuity), I want to rewind a bit further to the moment preceding the projectile pasting the moon in the eye. This series of transforming images (parsing it into shots ultimately obscures its construction) portrays the aerial voyage to the moon through a series of dramatic visual effects. Primary is the effect of motion. Based on Méliès's discussion of other films, we can assume that although the intended effect (and indeed the one achieved) is of a viewpoint traveling toward the moon, Méliès most likely used a static camera and moved the moon toward it. The need for steady registration of the image and the lack of a smooth mode of transport for the camera necessitated this reversal. This solution not only shows Méliès's pragmatic ingenuity in devising optical tricks (his *métier*, as he would claim), but also underscores the point I have often made that the theater of magical illusions constituted a sophisticated laboratory of visual devices designed to cheat and manipulate the senses. As early as the late eighteenth century, the Phantasmagoria had played with the ambiguity of enlargement as a depth cue: a magic lantern slide pulled back from the screen enlarged quickly and could therefore give the impression the image portrayed was rapidly approaching the viewer.<sup>25</sup> This is precisely the perceptual principle Méliès used in representing the approach to the moon; first the graphic image of the moon and then the moon-face increase in size relative to the frame and thus give the impression of a rapid approach toward the viewer. Indeed, the description Méliès issued to accompany the film describes this moment in terms of both approach and enlargement: "The shell coming closer every minute, the moon magnifies rapidly, until finally it attains colossal dimensions."<sup>26</sup> This portrayal of motion through enlargement, or rather of the relativity of motion depending on point of view (the famous perceptual problem of the train leaving the station: which is moving, the train or the platform?) supplies not only a means of conveying the narrative action of the voyage to the moon, but also the unique optical experience of motion, including its embodied ambiguities. Méliès's film does not simply seek a coherent verisimilitude, but rather a series of optical delights and attractions.

Let us look at the spatial, narrative, and perceptual logic of this sequence. Retrospectively it seems to anticipate the spatial flexibility of the cinematic mode. The sequence functions like a point-of-view shot, the view of the explorers as they speed toward the moon. As historians of early cinema have shown, editing or framing that functions like later point-of-view shots appear very early with the variety of films based around views through telescopes, keyholes, or microscopes. The cinematic

logic of alternation between a viewer and what she sees corresponds to a basic cognitive schema, easily understood and therefore useful in constructing a visually based narrative syntax. Basically the sequence of approaching the moon seems to operate this way. However, specifying it as a point of view becomes difficult because no “watcher” appears in the sequence (following Edward Branigan’s classic description of filmic point of view no offscreen look is shown).<sup>27</sup> However, as Branigan points out, we often understand a shot as a point of view without actually seeing a watcher. Camera movement, as in the unattributed point-of-view shots that became a part of the visual syntax of the stalker film from the 1970s on, can cue us that someone is watching the scene even if the actor remains offscreen. The moving view of the moon seems similar.

I would not deny this reading, even though I find it a bit anachronistic, assuming the key role of subjective shots so important for later dramatic cinema. I would prefer to think of this shot as indicating a nonhuman point of view, the view precisely of the projectile as it arcs toward the moon. More than simply indicating a view, the shot makes palpable a trajectory. In effect, this is a peculiarly technological and modern viewpoint, the viewpoint of the speeding rocket. Although this interpretation may seem as tendentious (and perhaps as anachronistic) as describing it as a human subjective shot, I would like to linger on the fact that so many early point-of-view films are through technological visual devices (microscopes, telescopes, binoculars, magnifying glasses).<sup>28</sup> Such devices provide a clear marking for a subjunctive shot, which partly explains this predilection, but I do not think it explains it away. Technologically mediated vision fascinated early cinema, portraying a peculiarly modern perception. The conjunction of vision and devices wittily doubled the cinema’s own medium of viewing and foregrounded the act of display by framing it.

*A Trip to the Moon* exemplifies the visual effectiveness of early cinema’s bumpy and playful approach to space. The sequence on the lunar surface employs jagged juxtapositions, whereas the approach to the moon plays on the ambiguities of motion and viewpoint. If I have described this approach to space in formal terms, I also feel it expresses the film’s narrative of achieving a new perspective and envisioning the new horizons of a world of the future. The spectacle of the earth rising as seen from the moon epitomizes the witty inversions of a new cosmos in which visual logic reverses its coordinates. A camera shooting into outer space means imagining a point of view transcending ordinary human boundaries, anticipating the later issues of surveillance and the “eye in the sky” satellites. While the visual surveillance that emerged with World War I discussed by Virilio remains in the future (the Wright brothers have

not yet taken off), there are direct connections between the aerial balloon photography of Nadar and the sources of *A Trip to the Moon*. In Verne's novels *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Round the Moon* the members of the Baltimore Gun Club who undertake the voyage around the moon are joined shortly before takeoff by a flamboyant adventurer named Michel Ardan. Verne intended, and readers immediately recognized, Ardan as a thinly disguised portrait of the photographer adventurer Nadar.<sup>29</sup> Verne saw launching into outer space as the natural outcome of Nadar's probing visual curiosity, which had led him from photographing the depths of Paris (the catacombs and the sewers) to his aerial views of the city.<sup>30</sup>

I will not launch a second stage of this chapter by discussing the symbiosis between space travel and photography. Raymond Bellour has provided a brilliant reading of the key role photographic and movie images play in Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Moon* (1929).<sup>31</sup> Outer space was probed by photography before being physically visited by man. Here the voracious nature of modern sight, its expansiveness and acquisitiveness, goes beyond Heidegger's concept of the world picture as the enframing of nature for the use of man, to the digesting of the entire cosmos as image. Méliès's rush toward the moon not only expresses this desire to bring the moon closer in order to capture its image (a theme rehearsed and embodied in an earlier Méliès film from 1898 entitled *The Astronomer's Dream*, expressing the enlargement of the moon seen through a telescope), but also in effect to seize it, to claim it for the explorers. The visual appropriation of this territory in outer space, as various commentators have noted, reflects an era of colonialism in which the exotic becomes a possession. Although the moon explorers do not plant a flag on the lunar surface as the actual U.S. astronauts did decades later, nonetheless in the complete version of the film they bring back to earth a Selenite as captive and trophy, recalling the native peoples of colonized territories put on display at world expositions at the turn of the century.

The aggressive nature of this territorial gaze hardly rests on this colonial impulse alone, given that the impact of the camera movement becomes visualized as the projectile landing directly in the moon's eye. The synopsis that accompanies the film describes this action as "the shell pierces the eye of the moon."<sup>32</sup> One could describe this violence as the extreme form of modern vision and its literal opening up of a new sort of space. This modern vision is not only mobile, but also aggressive; Walter Benjamin claimed that both Dada and cinema take on a ballistic force that "turned the artwork into a missile,"<sup>33</sup> an image that the Dada film *Entr'acte* (1924) literalized in the penultimate shot of its prologue, showing collaborator Erik Satie and Francis Picabia loading an artillery

gun with a shell (their expression as they sniff it identifies its potential effect as olfactory as well as tactile), which then launches out at the audience itself. This movement out from the screen toward the viewer recalls both the looming effect of the Phantasmagoria and the forward rush of the moon as the projectile/viewer approaches. But in Méliès's film the violence of the collision, the shock effect so crucial to Benjamin's concept of modernity, gets transferred from the viewer to the moon itself, which takes it in the eye. Is it accidental that this violence to the moon's eye anticipates perhaps the archetypal image of modernist cinema: the slashed eyeball in Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien andalou* (1929), the nauseating yet fascinating image that follows a shot of a cloud crossing a full moon?

I have made numerous claims in this chapter that follow an arc from the nearly undeniable to the more speculative. First, retracing the revisionist history of the early cinema of past decades I claim that *A Trip to the Moon*, like many early films, creates a collagelike space in which different modes of representation contend. I have also claimed that this eclectic style, based in providing the viewer with visual novelty, can be contextualized in relation to modern hyperstimulus of vision and its abstraction of space, a connection that the film itself marks through its portrayal of modern technology. Furthermore, I have claimed that this sort of aggressive visual style, while firmly rooted in the popular arts, could also be experienced as a means of portraying modern perception and provided models for avant-garde modes that appeared somewhat later. My argument does not claim this as the only frame of reference for early cinema, but I do claim it is a rich one. I find these connections exciting. For those who greet them with yawns, I leave them to their own delights.

Film history consists not only in the recovery of the past, but also a trajectory into the future. To my mind these processes are intertwined the way a vision of the past prepares a sense of a future. Whether Méliès's adoption by the avant-garde confused him in his old age (as a similar reception seems to have baffled Henri Rousseau),<sup>34</sup> or whether he recognized in this new generation the high jinx of the Incoherents and the spirit of Montmartre that marked the era of his youth, *A Trip to the Moon* (and its school of Incoherent astronomy)<sup>35</sup> became celebrated by the avant-garde, ranging from the surrealists of the 1920s to American 1960s pop artist Red Grooms.<sup>36</sup> As we know, history is partly based on misappropriations and misreadings, but on those that have the strength to change the way we see things. *A Trip to the Moon* plants the seed of cinema's mission to view the earth from the moon, to imagine a vision outside the common frame of spatial relations, with all its possible dangers and delights. I want to close, then, with a direct quotation of

Méliès's film, perhaps the most beautiful I know, the testament of the greatest documentary filmmaker of the twentieth century, Joris Ivens: the film Ivens made in 1988 with his wife Marceline Loridan, *A Tale of the Wind*.

No other filmmaker pursued cinema's possibility of portraying global space as tirelessly as Ivens did in his sixty-year career. He made films in more than a score of countries, including the Netherlands, the United States, the Soviet Union, Germany, Chile, Australia, North Vietnam, China, Poland, Romania, France, Italy, Spain, and Hungary, covering the transformations of the modern world: its wars, revolutions, and reconstructions.<sup>37</sup> His last film offers both an autobiographical reflection and a portrait of his beloved China. In one sequence Ivens and Loridan recreated a near-fatal heart attack Ivens suffered while filming in China. His hospital room is visited by Monkey, the trickster hero of Chinese opera and of the great epic *Journey to the West*. Finding Ivens inert on his bed, Monkey covers him with a brush painting of a dragon and, with his paintbrush, draws pupils in the dragon's eyes. Magically, a revivifying wind enters the room, blowing open and shattering the glass in the windows, and triggering rapidly cut images of fireworks and a dragon dance in the street below. The shadow of a dragon carrying a man on his tail flies across the hospital wall. Monkey waves out the window to the offscreen celestial traveler. The night sky and moon-face appear in highly scratched footage from Méliès's film. Reediting Méliès's footage, the film cuts to the projectile being loaded in its artillery gun, then landing on the moon. A black-and-white image of a huge mock-up of the moon with the shell piercing its eye appears, its mouth opens, and from it steps Ivens in a long cloak onto a set of the lunar surface; he looks around in wonder, hearing raucous laughter. Ivens encounters the drunken Chinese poet Li Po who drowned when he attempted to embrace the reflection of the moon in water, and a woman seated, like Phoebe in Méliès's film, on the crescent of the moon, but who says she is Chenge, the Chinese "woman in the moon" who fled the earth to escape her husband, but who finds life on the moon boring. Ivens also sees the earth rising above the horizon, and Chenge gives him a telescope to observe more closely.

Ivens uses Méliès's film as a fragment of modern mythology, a viewpoint from which the utopian ideal of a single world can still be envisioned. Probably no filmmaker so devoted himself to the ideal of global revolution and social justice, and few felt as firmly the promises and betrayals of this modern utopia of cinema and politics. His mock-up of the moon combines the moon that suffers the poke in the eye in *A Trip to the Moon* and the voracious swallowing moon that appears in

*The Astronomer's Dream*. Seeing and swallowing have often fused when one imagines the act of truly absorbed film viewing. The Chinese poet drowns, swallowed by the water as he embraces the reflection of the moon. I have frequently quoted the early film reviewer who described the plunging movement of a phantom ride film as "as an unseen energy swallowing up space," and another review that described an early film taken from a train moving through a tunnel as resembling the penetration of an eye.<sup>38</sup> The cinema from its origins has been fascinated by the image of the eye, seeing it as a portal, not simply to the human soul, but to a new imagined world: the Kino-Eye, uniquely armed to navigate and portray modern space.

## Notes

1. Dziga Vertov, "Kinoks: A Revolution," in *Kino-Eye*, trans. Kevin O'Brien, ed. Annette Michelson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 17.

2. Doron Galili discusses this in his dissertation in progress, "Seeing by Electricity: Vision, Temporality, and Intermediality in Early Television" (University of Chicago).

3. Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 115–154.

4. Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Verso, 1989).

5. See, for instance, the illustrations from *Un autre monde* from 1844 of an imaginary balloon trip: J. J. Grandville, *Un autre monde, par Grandville* (1844; facsimile edition, Paris: Libraires associés, 1963), 25–32.

6. Nadar's aerial views from a balloon are discussed in Maria Morris Hambourg, Françoise Heilbrun, and Phillippe Néagu, *Nadar* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995), 27–31, 108–112.

7. Muybridge's panoramas are discussed in Rebecca Solnit, *Motion Studies: Time, Space and Eadweard Muybridge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 153–176.

8. Angela Dalle Vacche made this claim at a symposium devoted to the work of Annette Michelson at New York University in 2003. At the time I strongly disagreed and partly offer here an apologetic rethinking of the issue.

9. On seeing *A Trip to the Moon*, students immediately recognize Méliès as the source for the Smashing Pumpkins' 1996 music video "Tonight, Tonight."

10. Méliès's magical shows and his influences were first detailed by Paul Hammond, *Marvellous Méliès* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1974). Laurent Mannoni, "Méliès, magie et cinéma," in *Méliès, magie et cinéma*, ed. Jacques Malthête and Laurent Mannoni (Paris: Paris-Musées, 2002), 37–51; Christian Fechner, "Le théâtre Robert-Houdin, de Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin à Georges Méliès," in *Méliès, magie et cinéma*, 73–115; and Matthew Solomon, *Disappearing Tricks: Silent Film, Houdini, and the New Magic of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), have all greatly supplemented this work.



11. Thierry Lefebvre's wonderful essay "*A Trip to the Moon: A Composite Film*," trans. Timothy Barnard, this volume, 49–63, details the many sources Méliès drew on, including this Offenbach operetta. His concept of the composite film is central to this chapter.

12. The *A Trip to the Moon* attraction is described in Woody Register, *The Kid of Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 70–99. Lefebvre also discusses this attraction, as does Richard Abel in "*A Trip to the Moon as an American Phenomenon*," this volume, 129–142.

13. Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 10–19.

14. Georges Sadoul's classic account of Méliès appears in *Les Pionniers du cinéma (de Méliès à Patbé), 1897–1909*, vol. 2, *Histoire générale du cinéma* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1947), esp. 141. Jean Mitry discusses Méliès especially in *Histoire du cinéma: Art et industrie*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1967), 40.

15. André Gaudreault, "Theatricality, Narrativity, and Trickality: Reevaluating the Cinema of Georges Méliès," trans. Paul Attallah, this volume, 31–47.

16. A. Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949).

17. Gaudreault, "Theatricality, Narrativity, and Trickality."

18. David Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D. W. Griffith and the American Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009); and Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

19. Among others, John L. Fell offered pioneering thoughts on these sources in *Film and the Narrative Tradition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974); Charles Musser offered his probing research in his trilogy of early cinema works *Before the Nickelodeon: Edwin S. Porter and the Edison Manufacturing Company* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); *High Class Moving Pictures: Lyman H. Howe and the Forgotten Era of Traveling Exhibition, 1880–1920*, in collaboration with Carol Nelson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991); and *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (New York: Scribner's, 1990); Charlie Keil, *Early American Cinema in Transition: Story, Style, and Filmmaking, 1907–1913* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2001); Frank Kessler, "On Fairies and Technologies," in *Moving Images: From Edison to the Webcam*, ed. John Fullerton and Astrid Söderbergh Widding (Sydney, Australia: John Libbey, 2000), 39–46; Kessler, "In the Realm of the Fairies: Early Cinema between Attraction and Narration," *Iconics* 5 (2000): 7–26; Kessler, "La Féerie—un genre des premiers temps," in *La nascita dei generi cinematografici*, ed. Leonardo Quaresima, Alessandra Raengo, Laura Vichi (Udine, Italy: Forum, 1999), 229–238; Solomon, *Disappearing Tricks*; and André Gaudreault, *Cinéma et attraction: Pour une nouvelle histoire du cinématographe* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2008).

20. See for instance the analysis in Pierre Jenn, *Georges Méliès, cinéaste: Le montage cinématographique chez Georges Méliès* (Paris: Albatros, 1984), 50–53.

21. Vardac, *From Stage to Screen*, 17, 34, 70–71, and passim.



22. John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), 7–8.

23. André Bazin, "In Defense of Mixed Cinema," *What Is Cinema?* trans. and ed. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 53–76.

24. Gaudreault, "Theatricality, Narrativity, and Trickality." Musser speculates on the effect of this temporal overlap cut in Méliès on Porter's *Life of an American Fireman* in *Before the Nickelodeon*, 209. See also Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes*, 96.

25. Tom Gunning, "The Long and Short of It: Centuries of Projecting Shadows from Natural Magic to the Avant-Garde," in *Art of Projection*, ed. Stan Douglas and Christopher Eamon (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 28–29.

26. "A Fantastical . . . *Trip to the Moon*," this volume, 230.

27. Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (New York: Mouton, 1984), 113–114. Branigan, however, speaks of "delayed POVs," which is not quite the case here.

28. Such early point-of-view films are described and analyzed in *Ce que je vois de mon ciné: La représentation du regard dans le cinéma des premiers temps*, ed. André Gaudreault (Paris: Klincksieck, 1988).

29. William Butcher, *Jules Verne: The Definitive Biography* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006), 163.

30. Nadar's photographs in the depths of Paris and his aerial views are discussed and reproduced in Hambourg, Heilbrun, and Néagu, *Nadar*, 27–31, 108–112.

31. Raymond Bellour, "Le Machine-Cinéma," in *Les Temps des machines*, ed. Françoise Calvez, *Cinéma et littérature* 8 (Valence: Centre de Recherche et de l'Action Culturelle, 1990), 49–55.

32. "A Fantastical . . . *Trip to the Moon*," this volume, 230.

33. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," 2nd version, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn, *Selected Writings*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2002), 119.

34. Rousseau's reaction to the famous banquet in his honor in 1908 is described in Roger Shattuck, *The Banquet Years: The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I* (New York: Vintage, 1968). A somewhat similar banquet in Méliès's honor was given in 1929.

35. An account of the early Parisian avant-garde movement of the Incoherents contemporary with Méliès can be found in *The Spirit of Montmartre: Cabarets, Humor, and the Avant-Garde, 1875–1905*, ed. Phillip Dennis Cate and Mary Shaw (New Brunswick, N.J.: Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum, 1996).

36. Pop artist Red Grooms collaborated with filmmaker Rudy Burckhardt on the 1962 film *Shoot the Moon*, which reworks Méliès's film. Viva Paci discusses the many influences that Méliès had on the avant-garde, especially Al Razutis, in "No One-Way Ticket to the Moon," trans. Elizabeth Alsop, this volume, 201–224. I might add that more recently South African animator and artist William Kentridge's *Journey to the Moon* (2003) creates another homage to Méliès's film.

37. Ivens's life is chronicled, somewhat controversially, in Hans Schoots, *Living Dangerously: A Biography of Joris Ivens* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Amsterdam University Press, 2000).

38. Tom Gunning, " 'Animated Pictures': Tales of Cinema's Forgotten Future, after 100 Years of Films," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Edward Arnold, 2000), 316–331.